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Pd. 2 Honors Humanities

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Wiki Post #3

*Kaffir Boy*

By: Mark Mathabane

Summary:

Mark starts school and is overwhelmed on his first day. There are so many children and it seems out of control. He wouldn’t have wanted to go anymore, but he is keeping his promise to his mother to attend school. He soon finds out that he is one of the top students in his class. Mark is always getting whipped at school for not paying his fees and not having proper books and uniform because his mother cannot afford it. His father completely disagrees with him going to school and doesn’t pay for any of it. He wastes all of his wages on gambling and drinking. His mother tries to use her small amount of wages to pay for their constantly growing family for basic needs and to get the older children into school. Mark wonders if there is really any point in going to school, especially with his father’s hatred towards it and the fact that his mother has to work so hard and even that isn’t enough.

At school Mark is still getting in trouble for not having the proper materials, so he decides to skip school for a while and hang out with his gang. However, his mother finds out and tells the principal and Mark is forced to go back. Soon after Mark is walking home after playing soccer and witnesses a man being killed. That moment terrified Mark for a while and made him consider what was really the point in living.

Mark’s father wants to start a beer selling business to earn the family more money. His mother disagrees with the idea, but they end up starting it, and it makes them a little more money. One day Mark’s grandma takes him to the white house where she works for the Smiths, so that they can meet her grandson. Mark is amazed at “the white world”, and the lifestyle of the people. Mrs. Smith is impressed by Mark and gives him books and comics to read. Mark is fascinated by the books and makes it a goal to learn English. His gang comes by because Mark is ignoring them, and after a fight, Mark decides to quit the gang.

Mark starts to realize the cruelties of the whites when he accidently boards the wrong bus, and when his school goes on a field trip and there is obvious segregation. At home, the beer business ends and the family is back to not having enough money and his father continues gambling and drinking. Mark gets a job to help, and he wants to drop out of school to help his mother, but she disagrees. Mark continues in school and also works at various white homes. Mrs. Smith gives him a tennis racket and mark enjoys hitting the ball around. One day a colored man watches him play and he can see that Mark has potential to be great.

Analysis:

In this part of the book Mark is striving to be the best that he can be. He isn’t a little kid anymore and he is starting to realize the ways of the world and what he needs to do to be successful. It is interesting to watch him get older and come to the realization that the effort that he gives towards a great education is what is going to determine the outcome of his life. It is saddening to see what this young boy has to go through. From witnessing death, to enduring punishment, to dealing with racism, to dealing with a failure for a father, Mark has to overcome many struggles. It’s also interesting to read his reaction to “the white world”. There are a lot of things we in America take for granted, and I notice it when I see what he sees when he enters “the white world”. “On the back of each boy and girls was slung a schoolbag; and each frail, milky-white arm had a wristwatch on it. It suddenly struck me that we didn’t even own a clock; we had to rely on cocks for time (pg. 186).” It’s not that Mark is angered by what he doesn’t have, but he didn’t even realize until now the things that he doesn’t have back home. I think Mark will use his increasing knowledge form school and his newfound knowledge of “the white world” to figure out to make a future for himself and succeed.

Application:

This part of the book shows the desire in humans to succeed. This desire has been evident throughout time and various cultures. Mark wants to succeed so he can better his future and his mother wants to succeed so she can create a better future for her children. The ideals of humans is to try and be perfect, and his mother tries to be the perfect mother and provide everything for her children, even when she doesn’t have the money to do so. Mark’s family goes about trying to achieve this perfection in different ways, because of the situation they are in. They aren’t trying to achieve the so-called perfect family because Mark’s father does not agree with his mother. His mother realizes that his father is a lost cause and is doing her best to take care of the family herself. Another characteristic in humans that is evident in this novel is being curious about the world in which they live. Mark is slowly starting to realize, through his curiosity, that the world can be a cruel place, yet there are many opportunities for happiness and success. Mark knows that being in gangs and skipping school isn’t going to get him anywhere. However, making the most of his education, helping out his family, and exploring what the world has to offer will ultimately bring him triumph.